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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - CLASSIFICATION

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: IS KANDAHAR CITY UNDER SIEGE?

REF: A. KABUL 2292

[B.](#) KABUL 2335

Classified By: Interagency Provincial Affairs Deputy Coordinator Hoyt Yee for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) SUMMARY. Is Kandahar City under siege? The short answer is no. The Taliban does not intend to seize Afghanistan's second largest city, but it has increased its power in significant portions of the city and surrounding districts through infiltration, intimidation, and terrorist attacks that undermine GIRoA and create a public perception of insecurity. The new American security presence has begun to reverse this trend. U.S. Military Police (MPs) have established themselves in the city under Canadian command, and the Stryker Brigade is clearing neighboring Arghandab District, which had been under Taliban occupation for two years. Initial stabilization activities, including a civilian contribution, will begin soon, even though fighting will continue there for some time to come. END SUMMARY.

Taliban Intimidation Tactics

¶2. (S) Afghanistan's second largest city (pop. 800,000) at the strategic heart of the insurgency is not isolated nor is it currently in danger of falling to the Taliban. The ongoing introduction of U.S. forces is welcomed by the Afghan Government (GIRoA) and the Canadians, and will be key to reversing the trend that has seen violence increase by 100 percent during the past year. In any case, the Taliban's objective is not to seize Kandahar City, but rather to contest control of the population through counter-governance that undermines and discredits GIRoA while provoking a perception of uncertainty and insecurity among the public. In this, they have effectively intimidated, encircled and infiltrated significant portions of the city and surrounding districts, despite increased security measures.

¶3. (S) Terrorism has brought the Taliban message home most spectacularly. This was particularly true of the massive August 25 SVBIED that killed approximately 45 Afghans, wounded another 75 and leveled an entire city block. VBIED and suicide bomber threats targeting GIRoA, ANSF and ISAF are a constant, as is fear that there will be a repeat of last year's highly successful attack that freed hundreds of Taliban and other prisoners from Sarpoza Prison. However, it is the invisible Taliban presence that has the greatest effect. Security forces congratulated themselves for mounting successful operations that allowed elections to proceed in Kandahar City with few incidents other than scattered rocket attacks and bombings in the morning hours. This tactical assessment is accurate, but masks the impact of a successful intimidation campaign that contributed to an exceptionally low turnout -- probably well under 25 percent in an urban

area presumably disposed to support the government and opposed to seeing the Taliban return to power.

¶4. (S) If there is relative freedom of movement during the day, the situation becomes more ominous after dark, when night letters are posted on mosque doors and Taliban check points appear on the streets. Uncounted assassinations and kidnappings, that for the most part target police officers and government figures, are another deep source of insecurity. In a prominent recent example, President Karzai's campaign manager in the province and several associates were kidnapped in early September and are being held for ransom. There are also reports of the Taliban shadow government's reach into the city, for example, summoning residents before sharia courts in the countryside to settle land cases.

GIRoA and Coalition Security Response

¶5. (S) In response to this deterioration, GIRoA and the ANSF have no option but to press ahead, relying on increased American and Canadian support to make up for their lack of wherewithal. In May, President Karzai ordered the ANA to take charge of security for Kandahar City. Under a newly revised plan, escalated measures are to include 100 percent vehicle checks at the "Five Gates" to Kandahar City, plus an additional 27 checkpoints within the city and its environs, expanded cordon and search operations by sector, and reinforced joint ANSF-ISAF patrols. Even if the city is not under siege, the cumulative impact may well make the public feel that way if the measures are ever fully implemented. Provincial Security meetings over the past three weeks have grown somber at times, with the Afghans pointing fingers and revealing their lack of agreement on what is to be done.

¶6. (S) There is no indication, however, that cooperation among the ANA, ANP and NDS has broken down. Usually supine Gov. Weesa has demanded answers and solutions from his ANSF commanders with growing assertiveness. He is reflecting increased pressure from Kabul that has taken the form of frequent phone calls from President Karzai, visits from MOI Atmar, VTCs with Kabul leadership and an unprecedented appearance by Kandahar kingpin and the President's half-brother Ahmed Wali Karzai at the September 2 Provincial Security Meeting (where he used the opportunity to propose that the Canadians give him \$2 million so he could carry out his responsibility as consequence manager for the August 25 bombing.)

¶7. (S) Canadian-led Task Force Kandahar has primary international responsibility for security in Kandahar City. They usually prefer to paint a rosy picture, but the tone was different at the September 16 Provincial Security Meeting. The session followed immediately after the broadcast of a pessimistic Canadian TV news special about Afghanistan, and was preceded a few days earlier by a major IED attack that killed two of its soldiers in Dand District to the south, where the Canadians have until now been touting a kinder and gentler approach to stabilization. A complaint by UNAMA that the 30 police they have been subsidizing to guard their Kandahar City compound were not doing their jobs led Task Force Kandahar (TFK) Commander BG Vance to rail against persistent ANSF complacency and exhort them to greater vigilance.

¶8. (S) The U.S. contribution to the increased security effort is significant. The 97th Military Police Battalion has just deployed its headquarters to Kandahar City where it will carry out joint patrolling and much-needed police mentoring with the ANP. Elements of the 4th Brigade of the 82nd Airborne will reinforce the assistance mission to the ANSF in outlying districts. The 1-12 Battalion, detached from TF Anzio in RC(E), serves as part of the Canadian battle group deployed to Zhari District, where insurgents infiltrate the city from the west. In the main effort, 5/2 Stryker Brigade is in the advanced stage of a clearing operation in

Arghandab District immediately to the north of the city, which had been under effective Taliban occupation for at least two years.

Comment

¶9. (S) There is general consensus that Stryker and the ANSF must hold and, with civilian partnership, eventually stabilize the Arghandab River Valley in order to loosen the belt that the Taliban have tightened progressively around Kandahar City. Most immediately, it will be important to lock in GIRoA and ANSF commitment to restoring and building its presence in the Arghandab.

¶10. (S) In addition to the two reftels, also see: DIA Kandahar Province Overview (S-30, 155-09/AFPK TF, 21 Jul 2009); CIA Field Memo: Security in Kandahar City (CIA DI MFAC 0219-09, 28 May 2009), and ISAF RC(S) KIFC Kandahar City Assessment (31 Aug 2008.)

¶11. (SBU) This cable has been reviewed by the Stryker Commander.
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